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AUTHOR Finkelhor, David; And Others
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ABSTRACT

What has in the past been called the missing children problem is in reality a set of at least five distinct problems, each of which needs to be researched, analyzed, and treated separately. The problems are family abductions, nonfamily abductions, runaways, thrownaways, and lost, injured, or otherwise missing children. Many of the children in at least four of these categories are not literally missing. Caretakers know where they are. The problem lies in recovering them. Because of definitional controversies and confusion about the concept of missing children, public policy still needs to clarify the domain of this problem. Family abduction appears to be a substantially larger problem than previously thought. The runaway problem did not appear to be larger in 1988 than at the time of the last national survey in 1975. More than a fifth of the children who have previously been termed runaways should actually be considered thrownaways. They constitute a large group of literally missing children who have not been adequately recognized by previous research and policy. These children are missing because they got lost, were injured, or miscommunicated with caretakers about where they would be or when they would be home. (RH)

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First Report: Numbers and Characteristics National Incidence Studies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children in America

First Report:
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National Incidence Studies

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

May 1990

David Finkelhor, Ph.D.
University of New Hampshire

Gerald Hotaling, Ph.D.
University of Lowell

Andrea Sedlak, Ph.D.
Westat, Inc.

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FOREWORD

The release of the First Report from the National Incidence Studies, *Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children in America*, marks the beginning of a new era of better understanding of the extent and nature of these problems. For nearly a decade, the lack of accurate information on missing children in America has hampered the development of policies and allocation of resources.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention sponsored this seminal study of missing children by the University of New Hampshire in response to a congressional mandate of the Missing Children's Act. Through this and other research, the Office has come to recognize that the problem of missing children is not singular, nor is it wholly separated from the problems of delinquency with which the Office also deals. As is true of the latter, the incidence of missing children is composed of different social problems greatly stemming from the weakening of the American family.

Effectively preventing and dealing with the multifaceted problems of missing children requires accurate, reliable information. Therefore, the incidence studies focused on identifying risk factors, on the children's experiences, and on the responses of parents and police.

The release of these first findings culminates a 5-year effort. While these studies were carefully designed to answer as many questions as possible, we also recognize that the results may raise new questions for which answers will be needed. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is continuing to sponsor research to find the facts and to develop useful programs that will protect children and reduce delinquency.

The point to remember is that all of the numbers in this study represent real children, real lives, real needs. The value of our research is in helping such children to lead safe and normal lives.

Robert W. Sweet, Jr.
Administrator

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OVERVIEW

Estimates	Estimated Number of Children in 1988
Family Abductions	
Broad Scope	354,100
Policy Focal	163,200
Non-Family Abductions	
Legal Definition Abductions	3,200–4,600
Stereotypical Kidnappings	200–300
Runaways	
Broad Scope	450,700
Policy Focal	133,500
Thrownaways	
Broad Scope	127,100
Policy Focal	59,200
Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing	
Broad Scope	438,200
Policy Focal	139,100

¬ Because of definitional controversies, each problem is estimated according to two possible definitions (see pages 5–6).

¬ These estimates should not be added or aggregated.

Major Conclusions

■ What has in the past been called the missing children problem is in reality a set of at least five very different, distinct problems. Each of these problems needs to be researched, analyzed, and treated separately.

■ Many of the children in at least four of these categories were not literally missing. Caretakers did know where they were. The problem was in recovering them.

■ Because of definitional controversies and confusion about the concept of missing children, public policy still needs to clarify the domain of this problem. Which children and which situations should be included, what do they have in common, and what are they to be called?

■ Family Abduction appeared to be a substantially larger problem than previously thought.

■ The Runaway problem did not appear to be larger in 1988 than at the time of the last national survey in 1975.

■ More than a fifth of the children who have previously been termed Runaways should actually be considered Thrownaways.

■ There were a large group of literally missing children who have not been adequately recognized by previous research and policy concerning missing children. These were children who were missing because they got lost, or injured, or because they miscommunicated with caretakers about where they would be or when they would be home.

BACKGROUND, METHODOLOGY, AND DEFINITIONS

The National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children (NISMART) was undertaken in response to the mandate of the 1984 Missing Children Act. Its objective was to estimate the incidence of five categories of children, those who were:

- Abducted by family members
- Abducted by non-family members
- Runaways
- Thrownaways
- Missing because they had gotten lost or injured, or for some other reason.

NISMART collected data from six separate sources:

Household Survey. The centerpiece study was a telephone survey of 34,822 randomly selected households, which yielded interviews with 10,544 caretakers about the experiences of 20,505 children. The response rate for eligible households was 89 percent. The modern sophistication of such surveys allowed us to derive accurate national estimates, while compensating for households without phones and other nonparticipating households.

Juvenile Facilities Survey. This was a survey of residential facilities, such as boarding schools and group homes, to find out how many children had run away from these facilities, in addition to children who ran from households.

Returned Runaway Study. This interview study with children who had run away and returned home was primarily methodological. Its goal was to find out if children's accounts of episodes matched those of their parents.

Police Records Study. This was a study of police records in 83 law enforcement agencies in a national random sample of 21 counties to find out how many Non-Family Abductions were reported.

FBI Data Reanalysis. A reanalysis was conducted of 12 years of FBI homicide data to determine how many children were murdered in conjunction with possible abductions by strangers.

Community Professionals Study. This was a study of 735 agencies having contact with children in a national random sample of 29 counties to determine how many children known to these agencies were abandoned or thrown away.

Serious definitional controversies surround each of the problems studied, which made it necessary to estimate the incidence of each according to ***at least two*** *definitions.* For example, in many States the crime of abduction can entail the coerced movement of a person as little as a few feet. Yet the public thinks of abduction in terms of notorious crimes like the Lindbergh or Adam Walsh kidnappings, where a child is taken a substantial distance, for a substantial period of time, or with the intent to keep or kill. Similarly, some State laws define parental abduction as an episode in which a parent takes a child or keeps a child for any length of time in violation of a custody decree. But the popular image of a parental abduction is of a parent who flees to another city or another country with a child or who hides the child incommunicado.

Thus, within each of the individual problems, we *present incidence estimates according to at least two definitions*: what we call, first, a "Broad Scope" and then a "Policy Focal" definition. "Broad Scope" generally defines the problem the way the affected families might define it. It includes both serious and also more minor episodes that may nonetheless be alarming to the participants. By contrast, "Policy Focal" generally defines the problem from the point of view of the

police or other social agencies. It is restricted to episodes of a more serious nature, where children are at risk and there is a need for immediate intervention. Policy Focal cases are a subset of Broad Scope ones.

We have also created two definitions of non-family abduction: the Legal Definition Abductions and Stereotypical Kidnappings. The Legal Definition Abduction corresponds to the crime of abduction as it is specified in the criminal law of many States and includes the short-term, coercive movement entailed in many rapes and assaults. Stereotypical Kidnappings, by contrast, reflect more closely the popular stereotype of a kidnapping, as a long-term, long-distance, or fatal episode.

These carefully crafted definitions were the result of a three-stage process, involving a panel of 34 experts, and a review of relevant legal statutes, law review articles, and prior studies.

FAMILY ABDUCTION

Family Abduction (Broad Scope) was defined (Figure FA–1) as situations where a family member 1) took a child in violation of a custody agreement or decree; or 2) in violation of a custody agreement or decree failed to return a child at the end of a legal or agreed-upon visit, with the child being away at least overnight.

A "family member," in addition to the usual meaning, included anyone with a romantic or sexual involvement with a parent. Moreover, "abductions" could be perpetrated by custodial as well as noncustodial caretakers. The incidence estimates were based entirely on the Household Survey portion of NISMART.

There were an estimated 354,100 Broad Scope Family Abductions in 1988 (Figure FA–2). This is quite a bit higher than earlier guesstimates of 25,000 to 100,000.

A Policy Focal Family Abduction was a more serious episode, entailing one of three additional aggravating conditions:

- An attempt was made to conceal the taking or the whereabouts of the child or to prevent contact with the child; or
- The child was transported out of State; or
- There was evidence that the abductor had the intent to keep the child indefinitely or to permanently alter custodial privileges.

There were an estimated 163,200 Policy Focal Family Abductions in 1988, or 46 percent of the Broad Scope cases. Family Abduction had the largest estimated incidence of any Policy Focal category in NISMART.

Most of the Broad Scope Family Abductions were perpetrated by men, noncustodial fathers, and father figures. Most victims were children from ages 2 to 11 with slightly more at younger ages, but relatively few infants and older teens. Half involved unauthorized takings, mostly from the children's homes; half involved failures to return the child after an authorized visit or stay.

The most common times for Family Abductions were in January and August. These are the times when school vacations end and visitations are exchanged. Most of the episodes lasted 2 days to a week, with very few, 10 percent, a month or more. In only a tiny fraction, 1 percent or less, was the child still being held by the abductor.

FAMILY ABDUCTION: DEFINITION

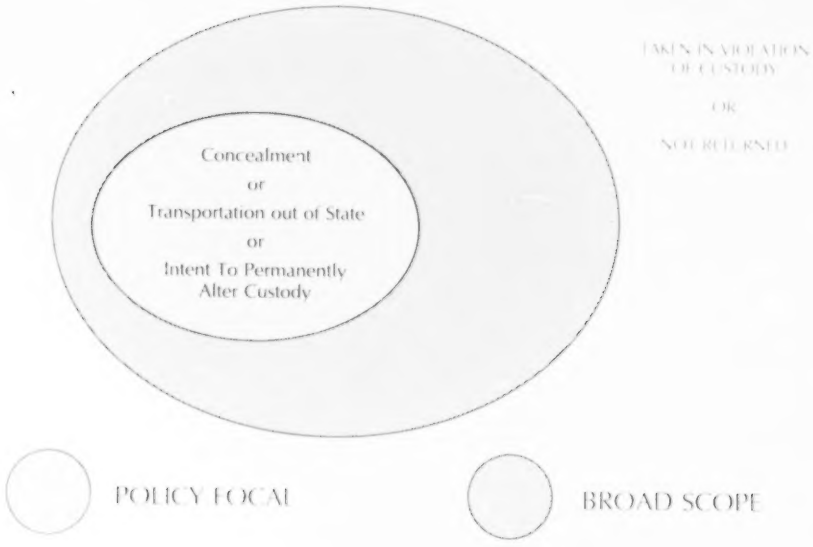


Figure FA-1

FAMILY ABDUCTION: INCIDENCE 1988

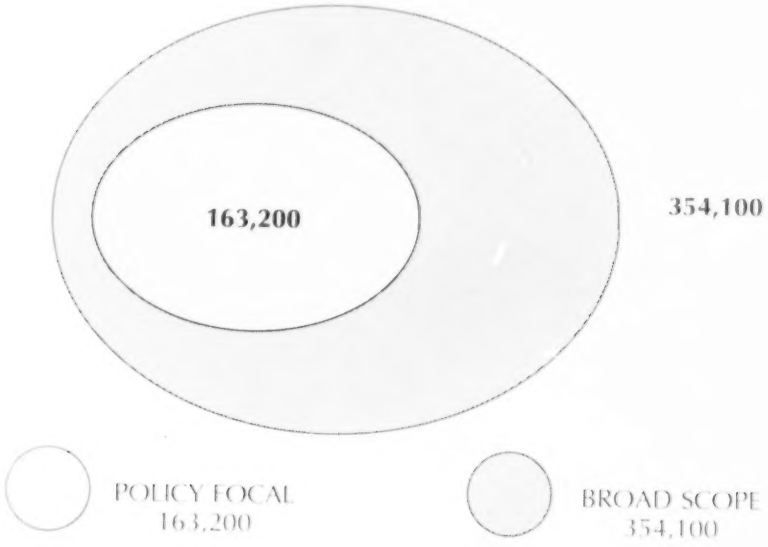


Figure FA-2

The period immediately after a divorce was *not* when most Family Abductions occurred. Instead 41 percent occurred before the relationship ended. Another 41 percent did not occur until 2 or more years after a divorce or separation. This was probably because it took time for parents to develop new stable households, move to other communities, develop new relationships and become disenchanted with the legal system—all factors that could precipitate abductions.

A number of figures give a sense of the scope of the most serious Broad Scope cases. In 1 out of 10 cases the child was removed from the State. In 3 out of 10 cases the child experienced serious or mild mental harm, according to the caretaker. In about a third of the cases there was an attempt to conceal the child's whereabouts. In 4 out of 10 cases, the caretaker contacted the police. In 5 out of 10 cases, the caretaker contacted an attorney. Although sexual abuse is one of the most feared components of family abduction, its occurrence was unusual (less than 1%).

Also of interest, in half the episodes, the caretakers *did know* where the children were most of the time. The problem was not discovering the whereabouts of the child, but getting the child returned to proper custody.

There were interesting regional disparities in the occurrence of Family Abduction, with the South overrepresented and the Midwest underrepresented. It is possible that the more traditional legal system in the South makes noncustodial fathers pessimistic about getting a favorable outcome, so that they take matters into their own hands.

NON-FAMILY ABDUCTION

Much of the controversy about abductions by non-family perpetrators has really been over definitions. To the public, stranger abduction means notorious crimes like the Adam Walsh case. But in many States the legal definition of abduction is both encompassing and broad, including the coerced movement of many brief sexual assaults. When people hear high-incidence estimates based on the legal definition, many are disbelieving because they are thinking of cases like the Adam Walsh kidnapping. Thus, NISMART estimates were made for both Legal Definition and Stereotypical Kidnappings.

Legal Definition Non-Family Abduction meant the coerced and unauthorized *taking* of a child into a building, a vehicle, or a distance of more than 20 feet; the *detention* of a child for a period of more than an hour; or the *luring* of a child for the purposes of committing another crime (Figure NFA–1). Many short-term abductions that took place in the course of other crimes like sexual assault were counted under this definition.

Stereotypical Kidnappings required that 1) the child be gone overnight; 2) be killed; 3) be transported a distance of 50 miles or more; 4) be ransomed; or 5) that the perpetrator evidence an intent to keep the child permanently. The perpetrator also needed to be a *stranger*. A content analysis of newspaper articles showed that 92 percent of the crimes against children described with the words "abduction" or "kidnapping," in fact, met one of the five criteria. This confirmed that when reporters write and the public reads about abduction, they are thinking primarily of the Stereotypical Kidnappings.

NON–FAMILY ABDUCTION: DEFINITION

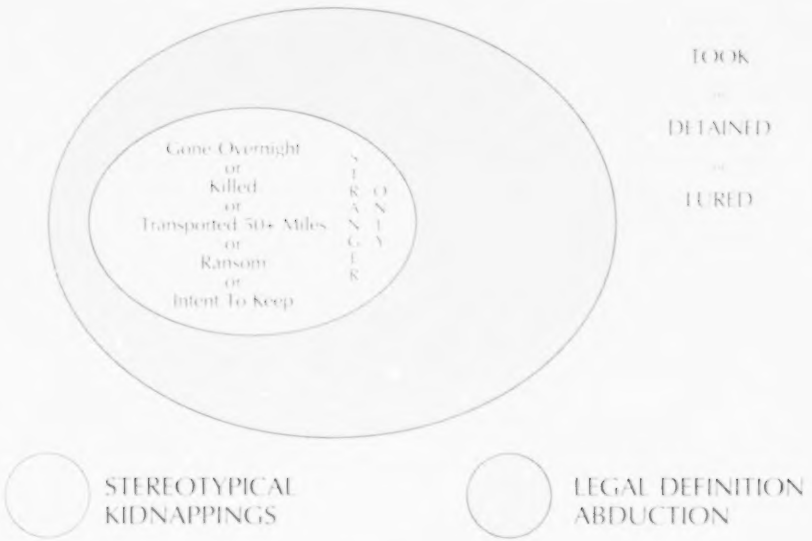


Figure NFA–1

NON–FAMILY ABDUCTION: INCIDENCE
1988

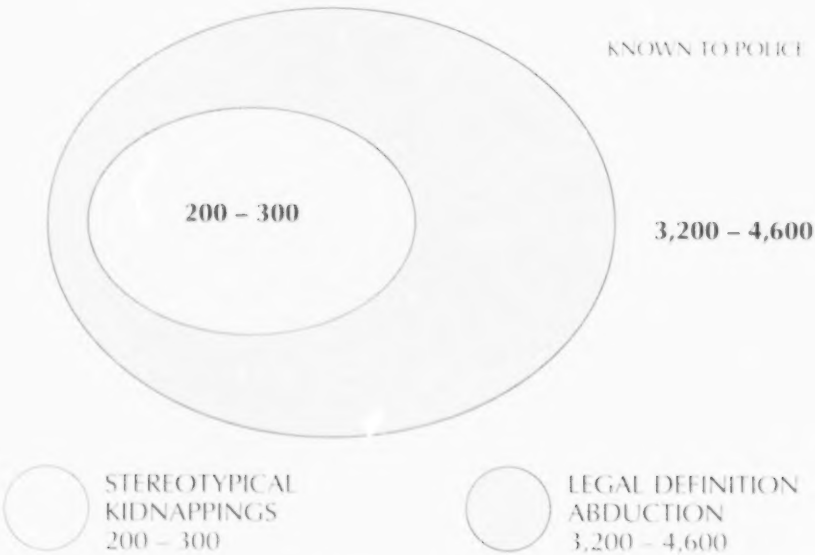


Figure NFA–2

Because of small numbers, no reliable estimates could be constructed from the Household Survey. So, the Non-Family Abduction estimates came primarily from the Police Records Study. In addition, we developed an estimate of the number of Stranger Abduction Homicides by reanalyzing 12 years of FBI homicide data.

An estimated 3,200 to 4,600 *Legal Definition Non-Family Abductions* were known to law enforcement in 1988 (Figure NFA–2).

Of these, an estimated 200 to 300 were *Stereotypical Kidnappings.*

Based on FBI data, there were also an estimated 43 to 147 *Stranger Abduction Homicides* annually between 1976 and 1987.

Although we have a high degree of confidence in the estimates for Abduction Homicides and Stereotypical Kidnappings, we believe that the estimate for Legal Definition Non-Family Abduction may be low. A number of these Legal Definition Abductions may never be reported to the police, because the victims of these assaults or rapes are ashamed or intimidated. Such episodes would not be included in our estimate, which is based on police records.

Teenagers and girls were the most common victims of Non-Family Abduction. In Legal Definition Abductions, half the victims were 12 or older and three-quarters of the victims were girls. Blacks and Hispanics were heavily overrepresented among victims compared to the U.S. population.

Two-thirds or more of the Legal Definition Abductions involved sexual assault. A majority of victims were abducted from the street. Over 85 percent of the Legal Definition Abductions involved force, and over 75 percent involved a weapon. Most episodes lasted less than a whole day; 12 to 21 percent lasted less than an hour. In 2 percent the child was still missing at the time of the last police entry into the file. In 14 to 21 percent the child was known to have been injured as a result of the abduction, but much information was missing from police records on this score.

The analysis of FBI homicide data from 1976 to 1987 showed no discernible change in the rate for Stranger Abduction Homicides over the 12-year period.

In the Household Survey, caretakers did report a large number of *attempted* abductions: an estimated 114,600, all involving strangers. Most of these consisted of an attempt by a passing motorist to lure a child into a car, and no actual harm or even coercion against the child occurred. In a majority the police were not contacted. Yet children seem to have a fairly large number of encounters with strangers where an abduction seems to have been threatened.

RUNAWAYS

Broad Scope Runaways were children who left home without permission and stayed away overnight (Figure RA–1). In addition, if children were already away and refused to return home, they were also counted as Runaways, depending on their age and the amount of time away: 2 nights away if they were 15 or older, and 1 night away if they were 14 or younger. The estimates for Runaways came from two sources: the Household Survey, and also from the Juvenile Facilities Survey, which counted children who ran from institutions.

There were an estimated 446,700 Broad Scope Runaways from households in 1988 (Figure RA–2). In addition, an estimated 12,800 children ran from juvenile facilities (Figure RA–3). Because many children who ran from facilities also ran from households during the same year, **the joint number of Broad Scope Runaways from households *and* facilities was estimated to be 450,700 (the household estimate plus the 4,000 who ran from juvenile facilities only) (Figure RA–4).**

Policy Focal Runaways were Broad Scope children who in the course of their episode were without a secure and familiar place to stay.

There were an estimated 129,500 Policy Focal Runaways from households (Figure RA–2). Since we considered all runaways from juvenile facilities to be Policy Focal, **the joint number of Policy Focal Runaways from households *and* juvenile facilities was estimated to be 133,500 (Figure RA–4).**

There was no evidence of any higher level of running away in 1988 than in 1975. A comparison of NISMART results with results from the 1975 National Statistical Survey on Runaway Youth, using very similar definitions and similar methodology, showed almost exactly the same rate of running away from households in both years.

Almost all Runaways were teenagers. They tended to come disproportionately from step-parent-type households (where a parent was living with a partner who was not the child's other parent), compared to the occurrence of such households in the general population. The runaways from facilities ran primarily from group foster homes, residential treatment centers, and other mental health facilities.

Runaway episodes occurred more often in the summer. Two-thirds of Broad Scope Runaways from households ran to a friend's or relative's home. Eighty-two percent were accompanied by others during the episode. Half returned within 2 days. For 39 percent, their caretakers knew their whereabouts most of the time.

Among the most serious Broad Scope household cases, however, 1 child in 10 went a distance of more than 100 miles. One child in 14 went out of State. And 1 in 10 was still gone from the home at the time of the interview. Three percent had been sexually abused and 1 percent physically harmed. Thirty-six percent of the Broad Scope children had run away previously in the last 12 months. The police were contacted in 40 percent of the episodes.

The runaways from juvenile facilities tended to have even more serious episodes. Almost one-half left the State. One-third were picked up by the police. One in 10 was placed in jail and 1 in 20 in a juvenile detention center. There were small percentages who got involved in prostitution (5%), drug dealing (3%), armed robbery (3%), and other crimes. The staff of the facilities knew nothing about the whereabouts of these children in half the cases. Police were contacted in 73 percent of the episodes.

RUNAWAYS: DEFINITION

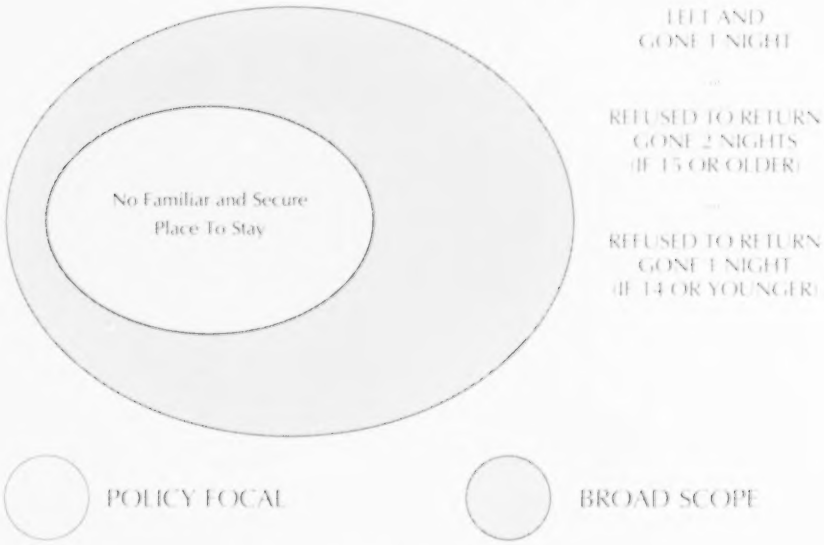


Figure RA-1

RUNAWAYS: HOUSEHOLD INCIDENCE
1988

Figure RA-2

RUNAWAYS: JUVENILE FACILITIES INCIDENCE
1988

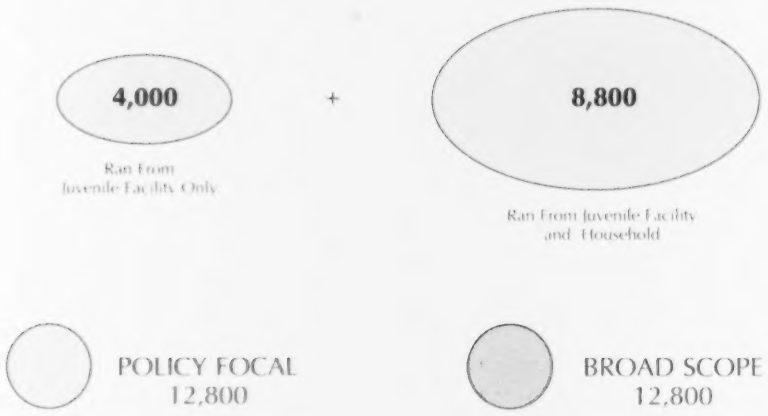


Figure RA–3

RUNAWAYS: TOTAL INCIDENCE
1988

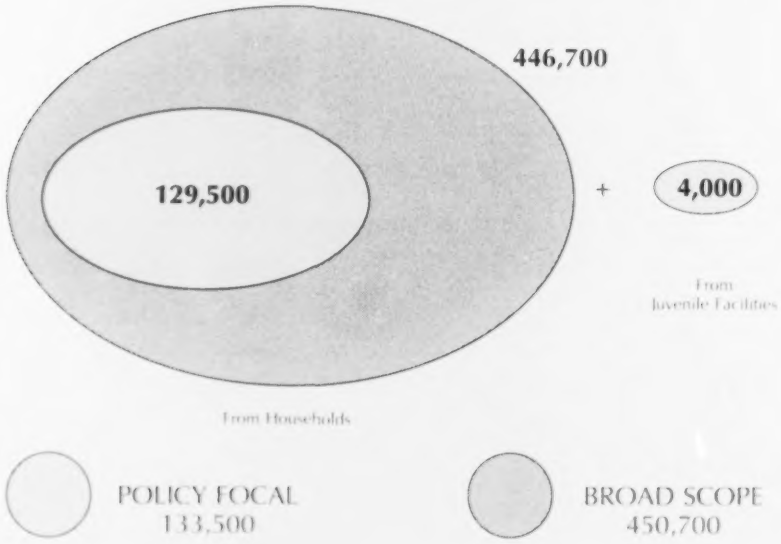


Figure RA–4

THROWNAWAYS

A child qualified as a Broad Scope Thrownaway if any one of four situations occurred: 1) the child had been directly told to leave the household; 2) the child had been away from home, and a caretaker refused to allow the child back; 3) the child had run away but the caretaker made no effort to recover the child or did not care whether or not the child returned; or 4) the child had been abandoned or deserted (Figure TA–1). In any case, the child had to be out of the household for at least 1 night.

The estimates for Thrownaways came from two sources: the Household Survey, and the Community Professionals Study, which was used to estimate the number of children who had been abandoned.

There were an estimated 127,100 Broad Scope Thrownaways in 1988, including 112,600 from the Household Survey and 14,500 who were abandoned based on the Community Professionals Study (Figure TA–2).

A Policy Focal case was a Thrownaway who was without a secure and familiar place to stay during some portion of the episode. All the abandoned children were considered Policy Focal.

There were an estimated 59,200 Policy Focal Thrownaways in 1988.

Thrownaways constituted about 22 percent of the pooled group of Runaways and Thrownaways, the group that in the past has simply been labeled Runaways.

The Broad Scope Thrownaways identified in the Household Survey were predominantly older teenagers. By contrast, the abandoned children tended to be young, one-half under the age of 4. Abandoned children, in contrast to the other Thrownaways, were also heavily concentrated in low-income families. In either case, fewer children from households with both natural parents were thrown away or abandoned than would have been expected based on their proportion of the U.S. population.

Broad Scope Thrownaways from households tended to occur in the spring. Fifty-nine percent were preceded by an argument and 27 percent by violence. Most Thrownaways went to the homes of friends and relatives. Most also stayed within a 10-mile radius of their home. In 60 percent of the cases caretakers claimed to know the Thrownaway's whereabouts most of the time; but since many of these caretakers were not actually looking for the children, they may have expressed a false degree of confidence.

Among the most serious episodes, a full fifth of the Broad Scope Thrownaways from households were still gone from their households at the time of the interview. This percentage of nonreturned children is higher than for any other category of NISMART children. Thirteen percent spent some night without a place to sleep. Fifteen percent had been in a juvenile detention center.

Compared to Runaways, Thrownaways experienced more violence and conflict with their families and were more likely to still be gone from their home. Also, fewer caretakers in Thrownaway cases contacted the police.

THROWNAWAYS: DEFINITION

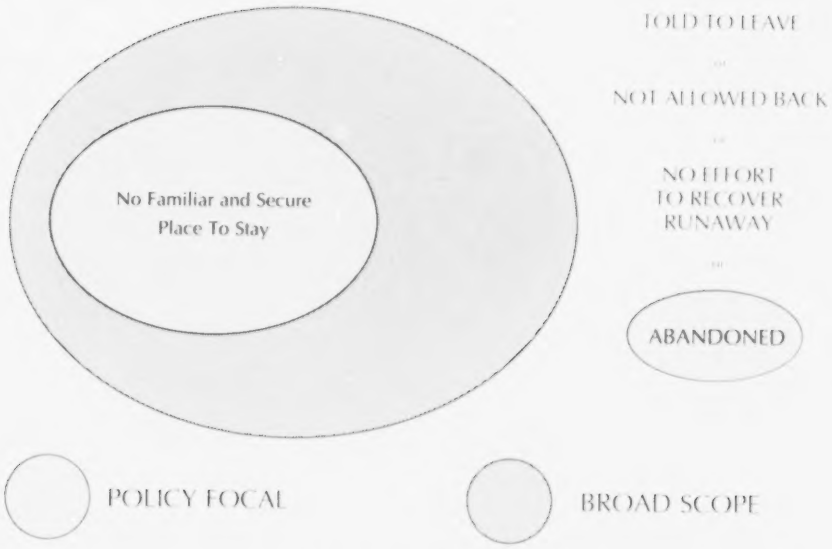


Figure TA-1

THROWNAWAYS: INCIDENCE
1988

Figure TA-2

LOST, INJURED, OR OTHERWISE MISSING

This was a mixed group of children, missing from their caretakers for a variety of reasons, who did not fit into the other categories. Broad Scope cases were defined as children missing for varying periods of time (from a few minutes to overnight) depending on the child's age, disability, and whether the absence was due to an injury (Figure LOM–1). The estimate for Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing was based entirely on responses from caretakers in the Household Survey.

There were an estimated 438,200 Broad Scope Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing children in 1988 (Figure LOM–2).

Policy Focal cases were Broad Scope episodes serious enough that the police were called.

There were an estimated 139,100 Policy Focal Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing children in 1988, or 32 percent of the Broad Scope children.

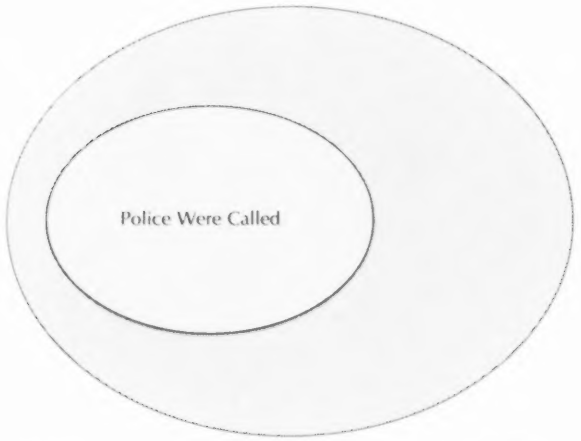
Two groups of children experienced the large majority of Broad Scope incidents: children under 4 (47%), for whom even short absences can be a source of alarm, and children 16–17 (34%), who are the most independent, involved in risky activities, and most likely to test, forget about, or misunderstand the degree of responsibility they have to inform parents about where they are.

Children who truly lost their own way accounted for only a small percentage (1%) of this group. Injured children made up 6 percent. The largest subgroup consisted of children who forgot the time, misunderstood expectations, or whose caretakers misunderstood when the children would return.

Most of these episodes were short, a third lasting less than 6 hours. Only 2 percent of the children were gone more than a day and only 1 percent were still missing at the time of the interview. Half the episodes occurred in the summer.

Although many of the episodes in this category appeared relatively benign, a substantial fraction seemed quite serious. In 21 percent the child experienced physical harm. In 14 percent the child was abused or assaulted in the course of the episode. This is more harm than in any other category except Non-Family Abduction. Moreover, in 32 percent of Broad Scope cases, caretakers were alarmed enough that the police were called (these are the Policy Focal cases).

LOST, INJURED, OTHERWISE MISSING: DEFINITION



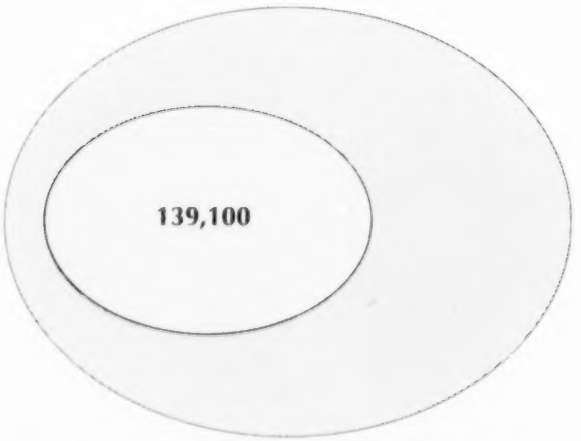
AGE	TIME MISSING
0 - 2	Any
3 - 4	2 hrs
5 - 6	3 hrs
7 - 10	4 hrs
11 - 13	8 hrs
14 - 17	Overnight
Disabled	Any
Injured	1 hr

POLICY FOCAL

BROAD SCOPE

Figure LOM-1

LOST, INJURED, OTHERWISE MISSING: INCIDENCE
1988



POLICY FOCAL
139,100

BROAD SCOPE
438,200

Figure LOM-2

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

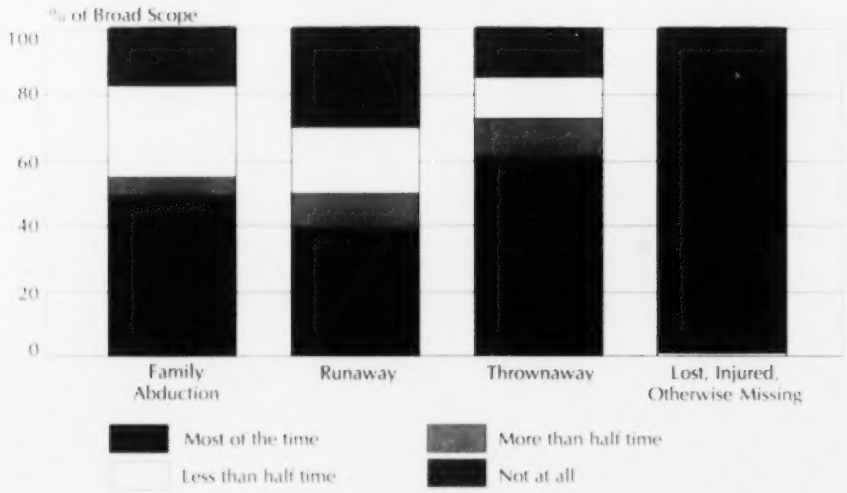
NISMART drew two important conclusions concerning the overall "missing children" problem.

■ Although the five problems studied here are often grouped together as one—"missing children"—in fact, they are extremely dissimilar social problems. They affect different children and different families. They have very different causes, different dynamics, different remedies, different policy advocates, and different types of institutions and professionals who are concerned. *They could not be lumped together for meaningful scientific analysis.*

■ There was a second serious obstacle to grouping these five categories of children under the rubric "missing children": *not all these children were literally missing. As the studies revealed, a large proportion of the* caretakers knew where their children were most of the time during the episodes. For example, in the case of family abductions, only 17 percent of the children had their whereabouts not at all known to caretakers (see figure). Many caretakers knew that the children were at the home of their ex-spouse, but they could not get them back. In the case of runaways from households, only 28 percent of the children were entirely missing. Most runaways were known to be at the homes of friends or relatives. Even in the case of non-family abductions, most episodes were so short-lived, as in the case of an abduction and rape, that the child may not have been missed by anyone.

Whereabouts Known to Caretakers

Household Survey



Thus, *we determined that it was not possible to develop a meaningful and useful global figure for the "number of missing children."* First, because of the profound differences among the problems, it did not make sense from a scientific standpoint to add together such disparate episodes as runaways, stranger abducted children, parentally abducted children and so forth, or even some portion of each of these problems, into a single number of so-called missing children. Second, children in these categories were "missing" in different senses, and in many cases, as we pointed out earlier, not missing at all. Finally, when such numbers as these have been lumped together in the past, it has created a great deal of confusion. People have assumed that missing children meant children who had been abducted or who had permanently disappeared. Thus, all the statistical findings and conclusions of this study are made about the five distinct social problems, and there are no global figures. We specifically discourage anyone from trying to create or use such a global number on the basis of NISMART statistics.

We offer the following recommendations:

■ Public policy around what has become known as "missing children" needs to clarify its domain. It needs to be more specific about which children and which situations are included, why they are included, and what they are to be called. If the five problems studied here need an overarching framework, we propose the compound term "Missing and Displaced," rather than the simple term "Missing."

■ Public policy needs to more clearly differentiate each of the separate social problems included under the so-called "missing children" umbrella.

■ Increased attention needs to be given to the problem of Family Abduction. The incidence of this problem proved larger than earlier estimates, and its 163,200 Policy Focal cases were the most numerous of all Policy Focal categories. Family Abductions may well be on the rise and yet could be readily amenable to prevention.

■ All policy, publication, and research on the problem of Runaways should take into account the difference between Runaways and Thrownaways. Thrownaways are a large group with different dynamics; they suffer from being lumped together indiscriminately with Runaways.

■ There needs to be special attention and an increased policy focus on the problem of children who run away from institutions. These children are among the most chronic runaways and the ones at highest risk of becoming crime victims and perpetrators; they need a specialized approach.

■ New attention should be given to the problems of children who fell into our category of Lost, Injured, or Otherwise Missing. This group, as numerous in total as Runaways, experienced substantially more physical harm than any other category except those who were victims of Non-Family Abductions. The 139,000 children reported to police in this category are almost as numerous as the Runaways reported to police. Some of the children in this category probably experienced quite minor episodes, but others were very serious cases. A policy about missing children needs especially to include the serious group in this category.

■ Another set of incidence studies should be undertaken 5 years from now, conducted largely along the lines of the present approach with a few modifications. These modifications would include a more comprehensive canvass of police records, a more direct sample of juvenile facilities, and a planned coordination with future child abuse and neglect incidence studies. In addition, we urge that interim methodological studies be undertaken to improve the future incidence efforts.

■ The Department of Justice should consider the possibility of ongoing data collection systems, for example, using the National Crime Survey or a police-based "sentinel" system that could provide yearly incidence statistics for some categories of missing and displaced children.